



For Immediate Release
Feb. 26, 2007
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

USACE Building Projects, Hope, Diplomacy in Maysan Province

By Betsy Weiner
Gulf Region South District



This overview shows the size of the 400KV station project in Maysan. The \$36 million substation will enable the Maysan government to build a 123KV station to step power down to the 33/11 KV stations that the U.S. Corps of Engineers is building in order to distribute power to homes in the marshes and other outlying areas. (USACE photo)

Tensions within the Maysan Province have made it difficult to communicate with local officials and move forward with reconstruction projects, but things there may be improving thanks to the efforts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

A resident office was established in Camp Abu Na'ji earlier in the conflict, but was moved to the Basra Area Office in June 2006, not only because of security issues but because of changes in MND-SE's (Multi-National Division – Southeast) operational strategy, according to Lt. Col.

Sherrell Crow, Maysan Resident Engineer. MND-SE sector is secured by the British military.

"Rather than stay conducting operations from a fixed location near Al Amarah, MND-SE decided to make itself more of a mobile security force, orienting primarily at the Iraq-Iranian border, blocking smuggling and other such activities," Crow said. "They also try to ensure local security with the sheiks and the Marsh Arabs. There is a heavy JAM (Jaish al-Mahdi) presence throughout the prov-

ince but the provincial government has SCIRI (Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq) elements within it.

"SCIRI is the political arm of Badr, a pro-Iranian sect of the Iraqi government, and JAM is the militia Muqtada al Sadr. So you have two things – Sadrist and Badr. The government is more oriented toward SCIRI, but there is a fairly large Sadrist movement within the government and this makes things tenuous for everyone."

Crow noted that working within these constraints challenges him and his project engineers, and that mobility issues hamper close scrutiny of the projects. He added that Iraqi engineers who work the projects generally live in the area and rarely come to Basra for meetings. "We communicate by e-mail for the most part," he said. "But let me be clear – it is very dangerous in Maysan, more so than any other southern province. Militia members walk the streets openly. We are limited in how far we can go; however, this hasn't stopped us."

One of the hallmark projects being built in Maysan is a 400 Kilovolt (KV) electrical substation project, valued at \$36 million, which, according to Crow, will eventually tap into the already existing 400 KV transmission lines that already exist within Maysan. He explained that the process begins with electrical generation created by huge turbine engines, generators outside of Maysan to the southeast.

"All they have largely is distribution," he said. "But the existing 400KV lines coming from Basra must be stepped down to 132KV, and that, in turn, has to be stepped down to 33/11 KV to be distributed locally."

GRS also is currently constructing eight 33/11 KV substations that will eventually supply the electricity to neighborhoods and industry, and that this power has to be stepped down even more to be distributed to homes and businesses. "The Minister of Electricity will have to program more projects to provide the final links between the 132KV part of the substation and these 33/11 substations," he said.

"Once completed these electrical projects will provide the principle power to the southern and central part of the province.

"Right now, on the southern end of the province, they have hardly any electricity. This is principally the marsh areas and the cities located around that area – cities like Qalat Salih and Majjar Al Kabir, the second largest city in the province with a population of 200,000 people; they have some electricity but it is spotty and is supplied by substations to the north that are well over their capacity."

Other projects being built in Maysan include four primary healthcare centers and a \$6 million, 23-kilometer road project, recently getting underway. "What we are doing is paralleling an existing road," said Crow. "That road is one of busiest in province and has large volumes of truck traffic. It essentially is a two-lane road now and we are building an additional two lanes, with three bridges through the largely agricultural area between Al Maymona and Al Amarah to the north."

He emphasized that 10 kilometers of utility lines will have to be relocated, a task which is being completed concurrently by the Iraqis. The Iraqi design-build firm got its notice to proceed on Oct. 5 2006 for the 360-day contract. "The project is approaching the seven percent completion mark," he said. "They are a bit behind schedule because of the weather, but they will make it up during the warmer spring days ahead."

Both of these projects (the 400KV and the road) employ about 490 people – 450 on the electrical project and 40 currently for the road. That number for the road could increase when the project picks up speed."

One of the most important things to note, according to Crow, is the fact that USACE has been successful in engaging a hostile government and bringing them back to the negotiating table. "Things came to a head right before the British pulled out of Abu Na'ji," he said. "The Maysan governor walked away from the Coalition and for eight months there was

no diplomacy at all. There were attempts to maintain relations with chief of police and some security elements, including the Iraqi army, but from the provincial government there was no dialogue.

"USACE interestingly enough was able to get a few of the provincial council members back to the table. Now the Maysan government sees this as positive steps – they see the coalition as coming back. We've got something to offer them and will try to engage and help by doing capacity building with their public works organization."

Crow noted that other donors are working within the province and that the coalition construction is a small percentage of what is being done. "These folks (in Maysan) are trying to manage the complexity of all the things being pushed their way," he said. "But we (the coalition) have come back and have worked with them to get an-

other eight projects or so approved through ESF funding and will continue other project applications. GRS (Gulf Region South) was a big factor in opening diplomatic relations because now the governor is coming to these meetings: the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team).

"Maysan has a PRDC (Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee) and they are actually more focused and are generally more in agreement on priorities than Basrah's PRDC is. They have provided us a prioritized list of 30 projects and we have funded the top five. We are working on the sixth with others waiting and we will get them all through. If we continue to instill trust in the government of Maysan, this will help alleviate tensions there and make our job that much easier."

***Note:** Betsy Weiner is the public affairs officer for the Gulf Region South District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, please contact Ms. Weiner at (540) 542-1528. E-mail requests can be sent to GRD Public Affairs at CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil*